

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

For Release June 2, 1969

Walker 343-2463
Carroll 343-5634

FEATURE

NATURE'S EXPERT HUNTER MAY BECOME EXTINCT

The Department of the Interior's recent decision to include the peregrine falcon on the latest list of endangered animals in the United States reflects increasing public concern for this bird.

The population of this predatory bird (also known as "duck hawk"), which ranges from northern Alaska to Argentina, has been declining until today it has almost vanished as a breeding species east of the Mississippi. Conservationists fear the decline will continue until the bird disappears from the scene.

Researchers at the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife are not sure of the precise cause of the decline, but, like the bald eagle, this falcon is probably a victim of pesticides, growth of urban areas, disturbance at nesting sites, noise, and air pollution.

Placing the bird on the endangered list notifies the public that the bird requires special protection if it is to survive.

In America, as in other parts of the world, the peregrine has been used in falconry because of its ability to catch small prey. It readily yields to training under expert hands and is considered less temperamental than other hawks used for falconry.

Adults are a dark bluish-slate barred with black on the back, and creamy buff barred with black below. The cheeks are also black.

Its scientific name is Falco peregrinus which translates as the wandering falcon, a tribute to its far-ranging travels. It has slender, pointed wings, and sickle-shaped sharp talons for snatching its prey. The bill is hooked and sharply pointed, a highly lethal weapon.

The peregrine's sharp wings enable it to dive swiftly from great heights where keen eyes spot its prey. Any small bird in flight is preferred, such as small ducks and pigeons, but peregrines occasionally take larger victims.

Nesting is usually in cliffs or bluffs; where these are absent, hollow tops of dead trees are favorite sites. No one knows whether peregrines mate for life but they have a dramatic courtship that includes

15860-69

diving flights and harsh shrill calls to entice mates.

Up to six maroon eggs are laid in spring. The young mature within two years, but it is not known how long they live in the wild.

In autumn some of the disappearing falcons migrate in distinct routes southward, stopping occasionally to rest and feed.

Sport Fisheries and Wildlife's Director John S. Gottschalk has no favorites when it comes to animals, but he admits to a special fondness for the peregrine because: "It's one of nature's better hunters, beautifully colored, and can fly with the best. Once it was common even in the hearts of our cities, including Washington, D.C., but now it has declined dangerously.

"Surely the peregrine belongs in our future. We hope it can succeed in reestablishing itself all over our nation,"

